

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4238

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ASEC

SUBJECT: RETURN OF DEPENDENTS TO ASMARA

1. I RECOMMEND THAT DEPENDENTS OF AMERICAN OFFICIAL PERSONNEL ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO ASMARA TO RESIDE. MY RECOMMENDATION IS BASED ON CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE FACTORS INVOLVED.

2. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT ITS INSTRUCTIONS TO EVACUATE DEPENDENTS IN JANUARY 1976, WAS ISSUED CONTRARY TO STRONG COUNTER-RECOMMENDATIONS BY BOTH THE CONSULATE GENERAL AND THE EMBASSY, NEITHER OF WHICH VIEWED THE LOCAL SECURITY SITUATION WITH SAME DEGREE OF ALARM AS DID THE DEPARTMENT. IN RETROSPECT, THE EMBASSY AND CONGEN JUDGEMENT WAS THE MORE PERTINENT. SINCE THAT DATE, SECURITY FOR AMERICANS HAS EVEN IMPROVED OVER WHAT IT APPEARED TO BE THEN. NEITHER (A) THE SITUATION BEFORE MY ARRIVAL (FEBRUARY TO JULY 1976) NOR (B) MY EXPERIENCE SINCE ARRIVAL (JULY TO NOVEMBER 1976) WOULD JUSTIFY A CONTINUED BAN ON DEPENDENTS IN ASMARA. I HAVE WAITED FOUR MONTHS SINCE MY ARRIVAL HOWEVER TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE LOCAL SCENE BEFORE MAKING MY RECOMMENDATION. NOTHING THAT I OR MY COLLEAGUES HAVE SEEN OR EXPERIENCED SINCE FEBRUARY 1976 WOULD SUGGEST THAT A PROLONGATION OF THIS TEMPORARY BAN ON DEPENDENTS IN ASMARA WAS JUSTIFIED OR DEFENSIBLE.

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3. IN CONTRAST TO THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IN ADDIS ABABA IN TERMS OF LOCAL POPULACE TREATMENT OF FOREIGNERS AS EXPERIENCED BY EMBASSY PERSONNEL, WE IN ASMARA IN LAST ELEVEN MONTHS HAVE NEVER EXPERIENCED THE AXE-THROWING, STONING OF INDIVIDUALS AND VEHICLES, ROBBERIES AT KNIFE-POINT, MANHANDLING BY MOBS, AND OTHER TYPES OF PERSONAL HARASSMENT DIRECTED AT AMERICANS (OR OTHER FOREIGNERS) IN ADDIS. ON CONTRARY, AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE RESERVOIR OF GOODWILL TOWARD AMERICANS IN GENERAL IN ASMARA, LARGELY A FORTUNATE LEGACY FROM KAGNEW STATION IN ITS MORE OPULENT DAYS. WE DO NOT WORK OR LIVE IN A QUIETLY HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT AS OCCASSIONALLY EXPERIENCED BY FS PERSONNEL IN POSTS ELSEWHERE.

4. THE DANGER OF KIDNAPPING OF OFFICIAL AMERICANS APPEARS TO HAVE RECEDED INTO THE BACKGROUND (ASMARA 0871). OF COURSE, NO DIPLOMATIC OFFICIAL ANY PLACE IN THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE IMMUNE FROM TERRORIST ACTION, BUT AMERICAN PERSONNEL IN ASMARA HAVE NOT BEEN SPECIFIC TARGETS OF KIDNAP ATTEMPTS OR OTHER PERSONAL THREATS OF DANGER FOR ELEVEN MONTHS (SINCE DECEMBER 1975). IN ANY CASE, NO FOREIGN DEPENDENT HAS EVEN BEEN DELIBERATELY SEIZED BY ERITREAN INSURGENTS DESPITE AMPLE OPPORTUNITY. (THE TYLERS WERE SEIZED BY TIGREAN REBELS.) IN FACT, IT APPEARS TO BE A DELIBERATE ELF/PLF POLICY TO AVOID THREATS TO OR KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN DEPENDENTS.

5. AS IN MOST CITIES, HOWEVER, THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING CAUGHT UP IN LOCAL INCIDENTS. (THIS HAS BEEN A CONSTANT DANGER AT EVERY POST I HAVE SERVED.) NONETHELESS, THE CAREFUL AND REASONABLE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WE OBSERVE WILL CONTINUE TO PRECLUDE THE LIKELIHOOD OF THAT HAPPENING HERE. IN ANY CASE, THE POSSIBILITY OF LOCAL HARASSMENT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE LIST OF CRITERIA FOR A POST DIFFERENTIAL, NOT A SPECIFIC REASON FOR BANNING DEPENDENTS FROM A POST. IN CONTRAST TO THE RELATIVE SECURITY FOR AMERICAN PERSONNEL IN ASMARA (NO INCIDENT IN 11 MONTHS), MY OWN CHILDREN WERE MANHANDLED BY A THREATENING MOB IN ADDIS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR SAFER HERE. IN RECENT MEMORY, AMERICAN DEPENDENTS HAVE NEVER RPT NEVER BEEN THE TARGET OF KIDNAPPING OR HARASSMENT IN ASMARA.

6. MY CONSULAR COLLEAGUES (FRENCH, ITALIAN, AND SUDANESE) OF COURSE ARE NOT PROHIBITED BY THEIR DEPARTMENTS FROM BRINGING THEIR DEPENDENTS TO ASMARA AND THEY ALL DO. ONLY THE AMERICAN DEPENDENTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE DISTINGUISHED BY THEIR ABSENCE. MOREOVER, THERE ARE PRIVATE AMERICAN AS WELL AS EUROPEAN FAMILIES, INCLUDING SMALL CHILDREN, RESIDENT IN ASMARA.

7. ALTHOUGH THE GOE HAS ESTABLISHED SPECIAL SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR TRAVEL TO ASMARA, THEY ARE IMPOSED UNEVENLY AND TOURISTS, INCLUDING AMERICAN WOMEN, ARRIVE REGULARLY AND OCCASIONALLY STAY FOR MONTHS.

8. THE DEPARTMENT, AFTER ITS EXCRUCIATING EXPERIENCE WITH SPLIT FAMILIES FROM SAIGON AND VIENTIANE IN SAFEHAVENS IN BANGKOK, HONG KONG, AND MANILA, SHOULD BE VIEWING WITH EXTREME CAUTION AND CONCERN ANY FURTHER DECISION TO SPLIT FS FAMILIES FOR PROLONGED PERIODS OF TIME. THE RECORD OF THOSE SAFEHAVEN COMMUNITIES SHOWED A MARKED RISE IN THE INCIDENCE OF DRUG ABUSE, ALCOHOLISM, AND MARITAL PROBLEMS DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO ENFORCED FAMILY SEPARATION.

9. AT THIS TIME, I AM RECOMMENDING ONLY THAT DEPENDENTS BE AUTHORIZED TO RETURN TO ASMARA ON AN OPTIONAL BASIS. THE TOTAL ABSENCE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES AND EXTREMELY LIMITED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OF ANY KIND WOULD POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR SOME FAMILIES WITH YOUNG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN, AND SUCH FAMILIES SHOULD CONSEQUENTLY BE GIVEN A CHOICE FOR NOW.

10. I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS PROPOSAL AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS THOROUGHLY WITH THE CONGEN STAFF, THE OIC NAVCOMMUNIT, AND THE MANAGER OF CISCO AND THEY CONCUR.

DECON ON RECEIPT.
SLUTZ

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